

**Abstract of the Disclosure**

The invention offers new approaches to fulfilling an information need, in particular to finding a result for a query based on a large body of information such as a collection of documents. The invention accepts a query containing an unspecified portion that expresses the information need. The invention locates matches for the query within a body of information and returns the matches or portions thereof in addition to or instead of identifiers for documents in which the matches are found. The invention allows placement of term ordering restrictions, and allows intervening words between the search terms as they appear in the searched documents or contexts. The invention ranks the matches in order to provide the most relevant information. One preferred method of ranking considers the number of instances of a match among a plurality of documents. The invention further defines a new type of index that includes contexts in which terms occur and provides methods of searching such indices to fulfill an information need.

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